

Minutes
Redevelopment Agency
Wednesday, December 5, 2007
5:00 pm - Town Hall Town Hall Conference Room #1

1. **Call to Order** - Chairman Lee Kuckro called the meeting to order at 5:00 pm.
2. **Roll Call/Attendance** - Members in attendance: Lee Kuckro - Chair, Joseph Soja, and Michael Zaleski. Also in attendance: Martin Walsh , Town Council Liaison; Ken Rizzio, EDIC Liason; Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager; and Peter Gillespie, Town Planner/Economic Development Manager.

Members absent: Daniel Camilliere - Vice Chair, and Paul Thompson.

3. **Public Comments:**

Robert Young, 20 Coppermill Road - Mr. Young said that the Town's taxes have gone up 40% over the last 4 years, because the town has been overspending and planning poorly. All of the money has gone into the schools, so there is nothing set aside for redevelopment. He believes that the information put out by the Town about the referendum was misleading, because he believes that residential homes were not protected by the Town's eminent domain ordinance.

Lee Standish, 278 Hartford Avenue - Mr. Standish said that the eminent domain issue may not have been the biggest reason why the referendum did not pass. It may have been that citizens felt it amounted to a blank check for government. He encouraged the Town to try to find out why people voted the way they did, before another referendum is scheduled.

Rob Smart, 62 Church Street - Mr. Smart said that the people he talked with about the referendum were mostly worried about the added debt incurred by the Town. His estimate was \$1,000 per household, which is \$10 million divided by the number of homes in Town. He said the redevelopment zone was drawn wider than necessary, and included 2,500 properties. The large number of properties created doubt, and caused a lot of people to worry unnecessarily. Mr. Smart said that people do not trust the Town government to listen to the concerns of the citizens. An example is the recent Comstock decision, where 95% of the testimony was against the barn razing, but the Town approved it anyway. He also said that the Town does not need the Redevelopment Agency, because the Town is not qualified to deal with real estate agents, and it adds an unnecessary layer of government when the Town already has a planner on staff.

Ken Sokolowski, 79 Main Street - Mr. Sokolowski read aloud a letter before he submitted it to the Agency. He said that he supported the idea discussed in the last Redevelopment Agency meeting of conducting a survey to determine why the citizens voted against the referendum. He noted that Town Manager Therrien said at that meeting that surveys are expensive and often yield a low response and sometimes misrepresent what the citizens really think. He recommended that Quinnipiac University be contacted about doing the survey, or perhaps another entity with expertise in conducting surveys.

Ed Tevald, 894 Ridge Road - Mr. Tevald said that everyone in Town agrees that the tax base should be less dependent on residential property. He said that he believes the referendum did not pass because the public does not trust government and there were not enough controls on how to spend the \$10 million dollars.

Ken Rizzio, Member, Economic Development and Improvement Commission - Mr. Rizzio said that he is frustrated with the huge dependency on residential property taxes, the blight on Silas Deane Highway. He agrees that more needs to be done to find out what taxpayers will accept for a redevelopment proposal.

4. **Approval of Minutes** - [November 7, 2007](#) - Mr. Kuckro asked if there were corrections needed for the draft minutes, and none were requested. Mr. Zaleski motioned to approve the minutes, Mr. Soja seconded the

motion and the vote showed all members in favor.

5. **Bond Referendum** - Mr. Kuckro said that he appreciated the comments from the public and that they were similar to those raised by Agency members about how to better educate the public. Mr. Soja said that he agreed with the public comments that the taxpayers feared that the referendum was a "blank check". He said that the Agency should try to put together some more specific numbers for the public about a specific project.
6. **Public Information** - Mr. Kuckro asked for an update on efforts to convene public informational meetings. Ms. Therrien said that she knows a very well-regarded town planner that would be a good meeting facilitator, Mark Pellegrino of Manchester. This would be a good, low cost way of having dialogue with the public, but would not be the same as a survey. She said that hiring Quinnipac or UConn to do a good, reliable survey would cost approximately \$25,000 - \$40,000. She said she will try to get a refined idea of what services would be included for that cost, but that the Town would really need to put out a request for proposal. An RFP would yield the full information the Town needed on services and cost, and is standard procedure to put something like this out to bid.
7. **Funding Options** - Mr. Kuckro asked Mr. Gillespie to summarize what options were available to the Town besides the referendum approach. Mr. Gillespie distributed copies of a list of funding options that he compiled. He said that general obligation bonds is on the list, but he would not review it because it is the same approach as the referendum.

Mr. Gillespie said that tax incremental financing is by far the most common funding option used by municipalities today. He distributed a report by the State Office of Legislative Research on tax incremental financing for economic redevelopment. Mr. Kuckro said that the Town's bond counsel had previously told the Agency that this kind of financing needs a large scale project, is hindered by the state tax code, and requires close oversight. Ms. Therrien said that the Town of Plainville recently used this financing successfully, and she will talk to the former mayor to learn more about Plainville's experience.

Mr. Gillespie said that the remainder of the financing options on the list are existing options and generally provide only small portion of project funding. Mr. Gillespie gave a summary of each of the remaining funding types. STEAP grants are a good funding source, but are capped at \$500,000 so they can't be used for large projects. The town may have difficulty getting one right now, because it has been awarded 3 in recent years for a total of \$1.2 million. Connecticut Brownfields Authority grants are not a great option because the town must own the property, there are not many high priority sites in Town, and the grants of up to \$200,000 must be used for investigating the sites. Tax incentives is an option that the Town has adopted, but used only once. Usually taxes are frozen for a period of time, the amount is based on the value of the project, and the money must be used to invest in the project. There are some Department of Economic and Community Development grants that can be good for housing rehabilitation and Americans with Disabilities Act improvements, but Wethersfield does not qualify for some of the others.

8. **Redevelopment Planning Process** - Mr. Gillespie distributed a list of the typical steps in the redevelopment process. He said that the State's new Smartgrowth programs should have funding available for towns to update their economic development plans. The Agency members discussed various aspects of the steps in the process. STEAP grants could be used for parts of a redevelopment planning process, but the grants are offered only about once per year. The offerings are not made on a regular schedule, and they are not on the Governor's bond agenda at the moment. Mr. Gillespie said that the STEAP grant situation is a good example of why timing is critical in the redevelopment planning process, and that the timeline can be long and unpredictable.

Ms. Therrien said that she would continue to look into whether there are landowners willing to allow their property be the subject of a referendum vote. The 3 owners that she had talked with so far indicated they would not want the publicity associated with a referendum, and would not want the complication of waiting for a vote. In addition, a landowner would want compensation for taking the property off of the market and holding the price prior to a referendum, and that would cost the Town money.

Mr. Kuckro said that the Agency could also do other things besides look at funding options. He said that the Town needs to adopt zoning regulations stemming from the Silas Deane Highway Master Plan process, and

the Agency could help move those changes forward.

9. **2008 Meeting Schedule** - The Agency members discussed whether to change the meeting schedule and format for the 2008 meetings. The consensus was to continue with two meetings per month to maintain the momentum of the redevelopment discussions in Town, and be available regularly for real estate issues that may come up. The Agency would also try to invite a guest speaker for one meeting per month.

For the January 2008 schedule, the members decided to move the meetings to the 2nd and 4th Wednesdays, to minimize conflicts with the New Year's Day holiday. That is, the January meetings would be on the 9th and 23rd. The schedule the rest of the year would be on the usual 1st and 3rd Wednesdays of the month.

10. **Executive Session To Discuss Real Estate Matters** - Mr. Zaleski motioned to go into executive session at 6:20 p.m. to discuss real estate matters. Mr. Soja seconded the motion and the vote showed all members in favor. During the executive session, the Agency members discussed real estate matters, and no votes were taken. Mr. Zaleski motioned to come out of the executive session at 6:50 p.m. and return to the regular agenda, Mr. Soja seconded the motion and the vote showed all members in favor.
11. **Next Meeting Date** - December 19, 2007 at 5:00 pm. (regularly scheduled meeting). This meeting would be kept on the schedule in case time sensitive real estate issues came up. Otherwise, it was expected that this meeting would be cancelled, and the next meeting would be January 9, 2008.
12. **Correspondence** - Mr. Gillespie said that there were several items of correspondence providing notice of events in Town: the grand opening ceremony for the TD BankNorth branch on Silas Deane Highway is planned for December 10th; the Salute to Business is on December 12th at the Wethersfield Country Club; and the grand opening of the Chocolate and Coffee Shop on Church Street is planned for December 14th.
13. **Call to Adjourn** - Mr. Soja motioned to adjourn the meeting at 6:52 p.m., Mr. Zaleski seconded the motion, and the vote showed all members in favor.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kevin T. Sullivan
Agency Recording Secretary